




## *Report to the Auburn City Council*

Information Item

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Agenda Item No.

City Manager's Approval

**To:** Mayor and City Council Members  
**From:** Mark D'Ambrogi, Fire Chief   
**Date:** November 25, 2013  
**Subject:** Informational Item- Report on First Full Year with SAFER Employees

### **The Issue**

This is a Staff report on the first full year with Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) employees.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

Staff will present an overview of services provided and organization accomplishments over the last twelve (12) months with the five (5) additional firefighting personnel hired through the SAFER grant. There is less than one (1) year remaining on this SAFER grant and staff welcomes any comments, directions, and or recommendations for staffing levels after the termination of the SAFER grant.

### **Background/Overview/Review**

In June of 2012 the fire department received notification as a recipient of a Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) federal FEMA grant to fund five (5) firefighter positions for a two (2) year period beginning September 21, 2012 and ending on September 22, 2014. The amount of this award is \$681,900.00 and covers the salary and benefits for five (5) positions. Five (5) firefighter's were hired through a process and began duties on October 1, 2012. Since this date two (2) SAFER firefighters have left the department for full time employment with fire agencies in the Sacramento Region. For each vacancy a qualified individual completed the final pre-employment examination process and was placed into the vacant SAFER position. There is no obligation on the City's behalf to retain these positions after the date of September 22, 2014 as had requirements of past

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SAFER grants where the agency was to commit for a third and fourth year providing a majority of employee costs.

The five (5) SAFER positions are assigned a shift; work schedule used by the fire department consisting of a 3 "platoon, A, B, & C" schedule where each shift rotates 48 hours on duty and 96 hours off duty. This brings the daily fire station staffing level to four (4) full-time and one (1) Relief (part time) personnel when no vacation, sick, or other leave is being used by personnel. This represents a 33% increase in daily fire station staffing levels for the fire department.

#### Areas of Service Increase and Operational Enhancement

With additional personnel the organization has captured the opportunity to engage in many programs and public services where it has been difficult in the past due to staffing and call volume. The past year has seen a significant increase in work productivity in the way of support programs to the department and public, public service through inspection and education, personnel training, and enhanced response in emergency and non-emergency situations. The following include a review of these areas.

#### Technology Use

The fire department dispatch center utilizes computer aided dispatch (CAD) and is based from data at the county assessor's office. To keep the most up to date CAD system the Geographic Information Systems (GIS) need to be constantly updated so responders have current information such as addresses, roads, streets, fire hydrants, premise information, and special hazards. With additional staffing personnel have not only captured the most up-to-date information for the county assessor's office, but incorporate this data into programs and systems that enhance response capabilities in the department. Examples are real time information transmitted out to all personnel regarding emergency incidents and critical information available in the command vehicle and first responding engine such as building floor plans, fire protection systems, hazards, and occupancy information. Approximately 80% of the framework is complete where an additional 20% remain for continual update and enhancement.

#### Business & Facility Emergency Planning

Fire personnel coordinate and collaborate in several business and facility emergency planning programs ranging from detailed complex evacuation plans and drills to training sessions with employees in basic first aid and fire safety practices. Facilities include senior care, government business, schools, professional businesses, and technical and trade business. There has been an

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approximate 75% increase in this type of service provided by the fire department this past year.

#### Public Education

Additional personnel provide the opportunity to be present in the community on a regular basis through school and community events. There has been a 250% increase in the number of contacts made with the public since the SAFER program began. A total of 2113 contacts were made including over 500 at the Gold Country Fair this past year. An additional three (3) personnel have been certified as Child Car seat Technicians allowing the department to have one (1) technician on each day available to the public. School programs have increased in number by site visits to the schools and classes coming to the fire station. Having additional staffing ensures programs will be completed without interruption.

#### Fuel Reduction Projects and Weed Abatement

Additional personnel have been used to coordinate and oversee fuel reduction projects such as the recent SNC Shaded Fuel Break of which was completed in half the time as initially anticipated. The Weed Abatement program was supported by extra personnel of which resulted in quicker compliance and shortened the process for forced abatement. Added personnel are able to assist and support Code Enforcement specifically with fire and life safety issues.

#### Defensible Space Inspections and Wildfire education

An increase in number of defensible space inspections occurred in addition to outreach programs such as the "Roof Campaign".

<b>Auburn Fire Department Defensible Space Inspections<sup>1</sup></b>	
<b>2013</b>	<b>2011</b>
Initial Inspections- 78	Initial Inspections- 32
Follow-up Inspections- 33	Follow-up Inspections- 15

<sup>1</sup>Using comparable full years: With SAFER staffing and without SAFER staffing

#### Training

Added personnel create the opportunity for multi-company training; two (2) or more fire resources training together. This training is more realistic and can be completed without the engine company always packing up in the middle of a training event to respond to an emergency call. It also allows for inter-agency training where two (2) or more fire agencies can train together while there is adequate coverage for emergency response. This has greatly increased the hours spent on training for all personnel.

<b>Auburn Fire Department Training in Personnel Hours<sup>1</sup></b>	
<b>2013</b>	<b>2011</b>
4149 Hours	2041 Hours

<sup>1</sup>Using comparable full years: With SAFER staffing and without SAFER staffing

### Deployment Response

Approximately 70% of the time the department staffs two (2) response resources, the type 1 engine, and either the rescue squad or in critical fire danger times the wildland type 3 engine with two (2) personnel. The squad or type 3 engine with two (2) personnel will respond to medical aid calls. This allows for a smaller piece of equipment to respond with less staffing and keep the first due engine in service for other calls for service and emergencies.

<b>Auburn Fire Department Resource Response by Unit<sup>1</sup></b>	
<b>Resource</b>	<b>Number of Responses</b>
Engine 1284	1124
Engine 1285 (New Engine 8/2013)	77
Engine 1271	227
Squad 1252	519

<sup>1</sup>Using full SAFER year

For emergency incidents other than medical aids both units respond in addition to any automatic aid from neighboring agencies. These include fires, vehicle accidents, and hazardous situations where additional personnel can provide safe and effective mitigation.

With additional staffing and resources a significant impact is made on major incidents. The most recent structure fire in July 2013 on Maple Street occurred during “full staffing” of which resulted in a very quick and aggressive fire attack. Although the building sustained major fire damage throughout, not many could tell that a fire occurred and renovation to repair fire damage was quickly initiated.

There are times when a second resource is not staffed or “down staffed” for vacation, sick, MTO, training, and other related personnel leave. “Down staffing” reduces the department’s overtime exposure hours when implemented and helps reduce overall personnel costs.

### Reduction in Response Times

During the SAFER period to date the department has experienced a reduction in response times. Does this mean more firefighting personnel

make fire engines go faster? The answer is no. However, due to staffing multiple resources several areas can impact response times: 1.) staffed resources are out in the community conducting various programs and when two or more units are staffed, one is generally closer to a call thus reducing response time from having to come from another part of the City farther away. 2.) When multiple calls occur there is another unit immediately available for response. 3.) When a second unit is staffed and responds to “same time” and “back-to-back” calls, the need for mutual aid is not required where such response times are greater due to distance of travel to the incident.

<b>Auburn Fire Department Response Times<sup>1</sup></b>		
	<b>2013</b>	<b>2011</b>
Average Response Time	5:05	6:13
Code 2 Response	5:52	7:31
Code 3 Response	4:48	4:56

<sup>1</sup>Using comparable full years: With SAFER staffing and without SAFER staffing

### **What Happens After the SAFER Grant Period**

#### **What has Occurred to Date**

In August 2013 a SAFER grant application was submitted to “retain” the current five (5) SAFER positions in place at this time. It is unknown when the department will be notified of the status of this request. Due to federal shutdowns and federal budget “re-arranging” this process will most likely suffer delay of notifications as have other federal grant programs. A note of importance is the SAFER grant program is awarded in three (3) different priority categories: 1- agencies who have laid off firefighting personnel, 2- agencies intending to retain firefighting personnel that will be laid off, and 3- agencies that intend to add new firefighting personnel to their current staffing level. The 2012 SAFER grant Auburn applied under priority 1 for vacancies as a result of the 2009 department re-organization where positions were actually eliminated. The recent 2013 grant application only qualifies under priority 2 to retain current employees. This puts the application in a more aggressive competitive environment and will have to compete with all priority 1 categories first in order to be considered to compete in the priority 2 category.

There is no obligation on the City’s part to continue the SAFER program after the performance period. In past SAFER and FEMA grants there were obligations placed on the receiving agency where additional years of employment were required but to be paid by the agency. This grant does not contain this obligation; it is left up to the agency to take action.

Now is the time to take a hard look at future staffing for the fire department and determine what additions can be incorporated into the upcoming budget process without SAFER funding. The SAFER performance period will terminate in the first quarter of the next Fiscal Year.

Options available for SAFER personnel after the performance period include: All five (5) SAFER personnel terminated as full time employees, all five (5) personnel retain full time positions by the City, all five (5) personnel be returned to "Relief" status, and or a combination of any of the above.

#### What Costs are Associated with Firefighting Personnel

To assist in identifying costs associated with firefighter personnel the following salary and benefit tables have been developed. These tables will also assist in future planning and development of the fire department budget for staffing. A breakdown of average costs for full-time firefighter personnel and Relief; part-time non-benefited, personnel are captured for review.

#### Annual Cost of Firefighter Position

<b>Auburn Fire Department Average Firefighter Annual Costs</b>		
<b>Salary</b>	<b>Benefits</b>	<b>Total</b>
\$48,917	\$21,211	\$70,128

#### Annual Cost of 5 Firefighter Positions ( As currently funded by SAFER)

<b>Auburn Fire Department Average Firefighter Annual Costs- 5 Positions</b>		
<b>Salary</b>	<b>Benefits</b>	<b>Total</b>
\$244,585	\$106,055	\$350,640

#### Annual Cost of Relief (Part-time) Firefighter

<b>Auburn Fire Department Average Relief (Part-time) Firefighter Annual Costs</b>		
<b>Hourly Compensation</b>	<b>Benefits</b>	<b>Total</b>
\$39,283	\$0	\$39,283

Daily staffing for the fire station engine company consists of one (1) Fire Captain, one(1) Firefighter/Engineer, and one (1) Relief (part-time) firefighter. This is the level of staffing prior to the SAFER program. With the SAFER program an additional two (2) firefighting personnel are added to the daily staffing. At no time during the SAFER program do staffing levels go below three (3) personnel. Many times staffing levels are at 3 or 4 personnel due to vacation, sick, MTO, family leave, and or training events.

#### Next Step(s)

In the event the 2103 SAFER grant application is not accepted there must be some type of plan in place to identify staffing after the performance period

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of the 2012 SAFER grant. Although it is not desirable to go back to pre-SAFER staffing levels, it is an option. It is recommended the next Fiscal Year Budget be thoroughly evaluated to increase levels of staffing for the fire department. This can be accomplished by examining several analysis of staffing scenarios including the retention of full-time SAFER personnel, expanding the Relief program, and or a combination of both. Staffing and response models can be developed and evaluated that include additional staffing at peak response times and days, non-traditional scheduling, and staffing focused on specific programs such as inspection and public education. This could also provide opportunity for the City to take a broad look and identify other departments that would benefit by using additional fire personnel who can perform various functions within the City.

### **In Conclusion**

There is no doubt that added fire department personnel provide a greater depth of service to our citizens and other City departments. Fire department personnel are an integral part in providing public education in our schools and at community events. The department coordinates with business and citizen organizations in disaster preparedness and coordinates and implements programs that help our community in wildfire protection. The department continues to identify and utilize technology to enhance services and train to maintain proficiencies so that work performance is of upmost professional quality. Response to emergencies with additional staffing and multiple resources ensures a quality and efficient service. With additional personnel the fire department and the City is meeting the needs of the community in fulfilling the mission to provide a valued public service. It is well worth evaluating the ability to retain firefighting personnel at this time to ensure high levels of service now and into the future.

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